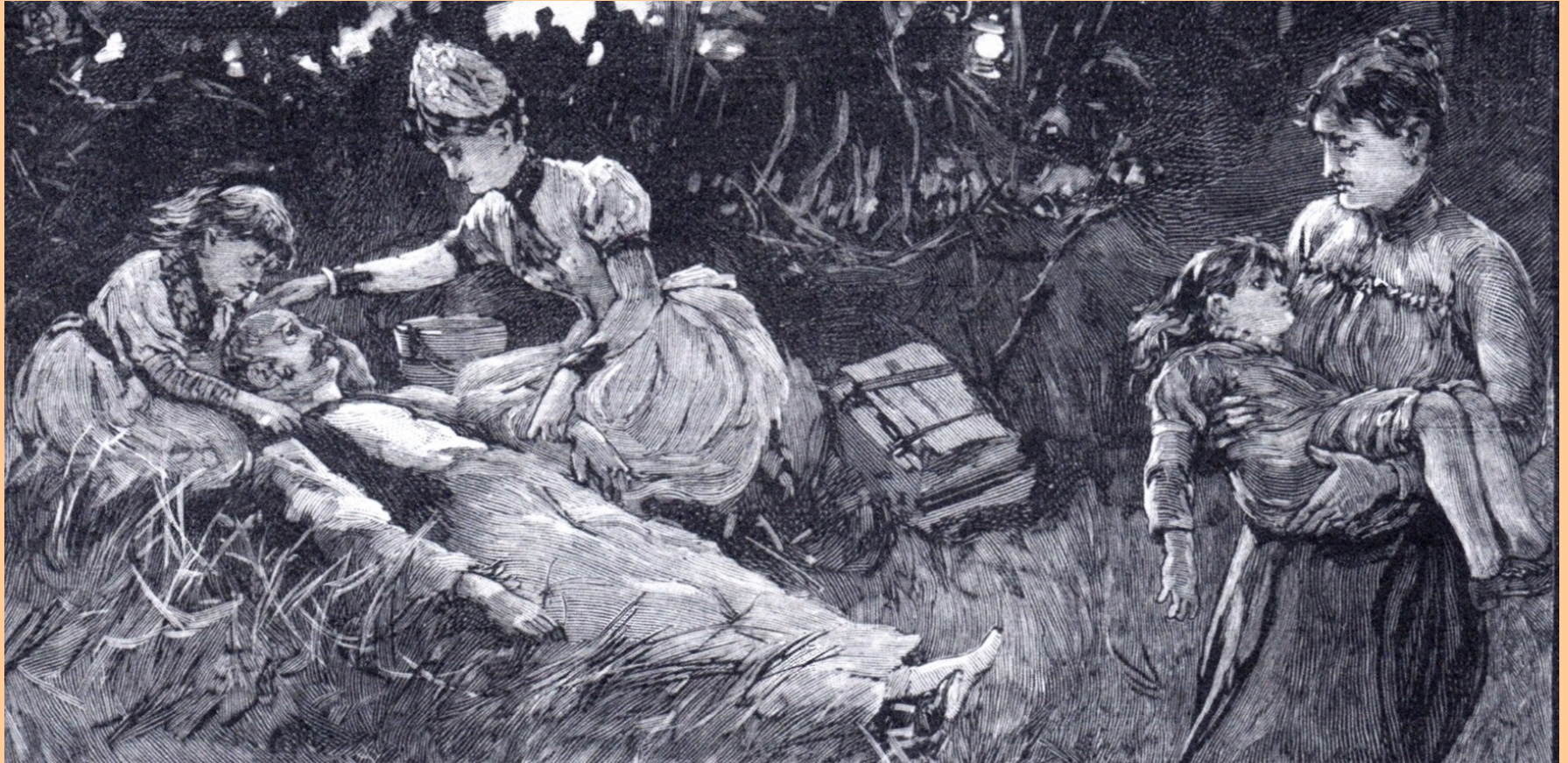


1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck



By: Dale C. Maley

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

Outline

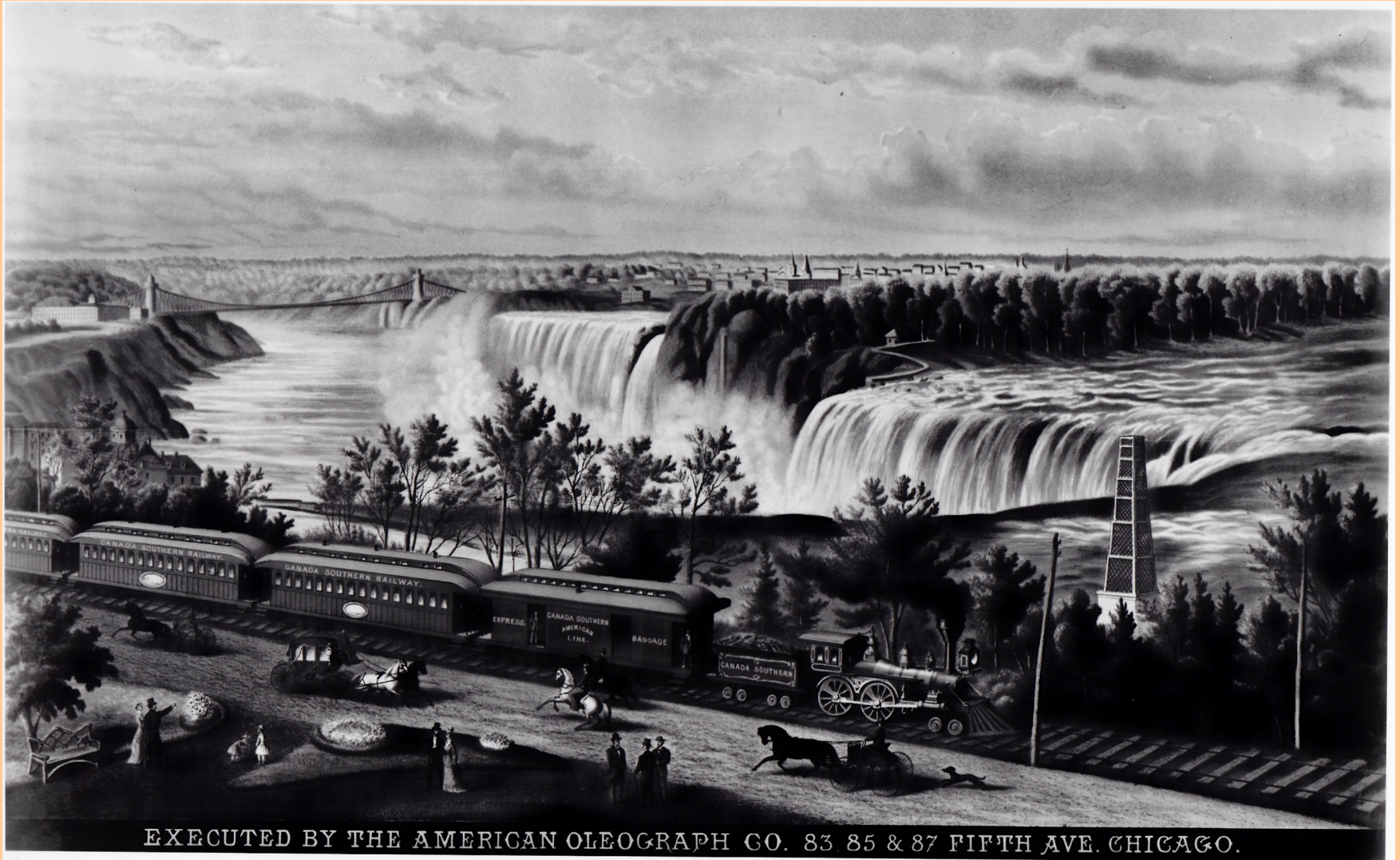
1. Excursion Trains
2. Typical 1887 Passenger Train Design
3. Typical TP&W Trestle Design
4. Environmental Conditions Before the Crash
5. Passenger Sources
6. Setting the Stage for the trip on August 10, 1887
7. The Wreck
8. Search for the Guilty
9. First Documentation of the Wreck
10. Latest Documentation of the Wreck

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

- Excursion Trains
 - Railroad owners had tracks and locomotives that were unused most of the time
 - Had all of these assets and not making maximum profit from the assets
 - Offer passenger “Excursion Trains”
 - Niagara Falls was popular destination



1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck



1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

\$7.50
—TO—
NIAGARA FALLS
AND RETURN
WEDNESDAY , Aug. 10
Excursion
VIA THE
T.P. & W. RY

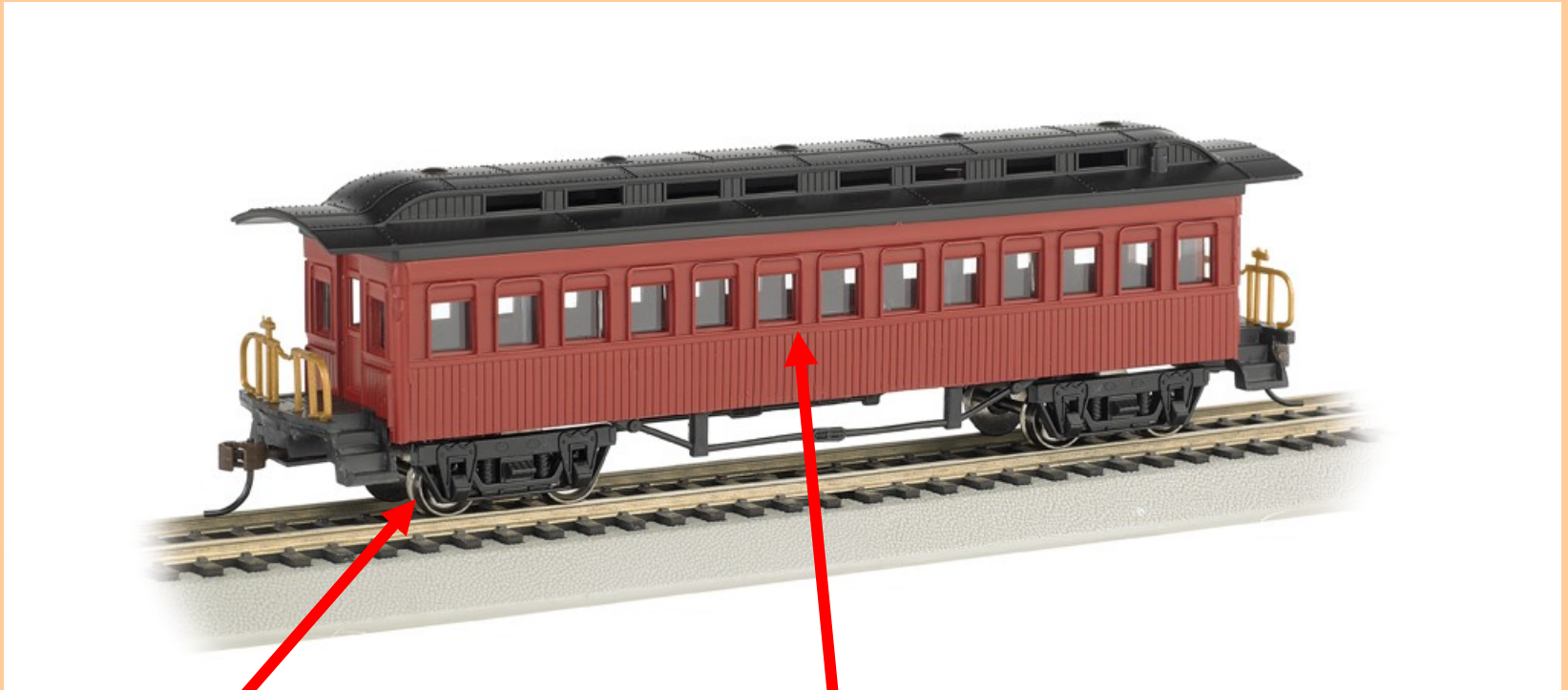
You Can't Afford to Miss It
"THE ONLY WAY" TO "NIAGARA FALLS"

For further details consult
General Passenger Agent, Peoria, Ill.

\$7.50 in 1887 equivalent to \$234 in today's dollars.

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

Typical 1860-1880 Passenger Car Design



Cast Iron Wheels and
“truck assembly”

Wood floor, wood
seats, wood walls

Today's cars all metal construction

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

TP&W Trestle or Bridge Design

- Concrete and steel were available, but more expensive than wood bridges
- TP&W used wood whenever they could because it was cheaper
- Although wood was cheaper initial cost:
 - vulnerable to fire
 - wood or coal burning locomotives often dropped hot coals upon the track
 - did not last long in outdoor weather



1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

Weather Conditions in August 1887

- August in Central Illinois usually marked by hot and dry weather with winds
- July and August in 1887 were typical
 - Hot and dry for many weeks prior to Niagara Falls Excursion Train
- Land along tracks lined with weeds, grass, brush, and trees
- Wood bridges very dry and very combustible

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

Excursion Train Passengers

- TP&W tracks ran from west of Peoria all the way to Indiana
- Largest and only big town on the line was Peoria
 - All other towns relatively small
- So, over 80% of the passengers were from the Peoria area
 - 625 Total Passengers

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

Setting the Stage for the Aug 10th Trip

- Drought conditions along the tracks
- TP&W crews were out burning weeds along the track
- Freight train had run down the tracks before the excursion train
- 2 Locomotives and about 15 cars picked up most of the passengers in Peoria area, started heading east
- 26 Fairbury area people boarded the train at 7:15 PM

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

“The Wreck”

- Train went through Forrest & Chatsworth ok
- East of Chatsworth, engineer in 1st locomotive saw fire on wood bridge
- 1st of two locomotives made it over wood bridge ok
- 2nd locomotive went down into the ditch.
 - Engineer killed
- Wooden passenger cars went down 1 after the other into the ditch

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

“The Wreck”

- Telescoping = When the 2nd passenger car went down, it sheared off the 1st car down to the wood floor.
 - All passengers immediately brutally killed

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

“The Wreck”

- There is photo showing 3 cars on top of each other
 - Normally 3x15 feet high = 45 feet high
 - 3 telescoped cars only about 12 feet high



1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

“The Wreck”

- Best estimate is 85 passengers killed and 372 injured
- Crash stills ranks as 7th worst in U.S. History
- Exact data on the crash will never be known....
 - Number and type of cars
 - Number of fatalities
 - Number of injured
 - Where did all the cars end up with dimensioned drawings

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

“The Wreck”

- If this wreck occurred today:
 - Thousands of photographs & videos
 - Thorough investigation by National Safety Transportation Board with drawings
 - Accident re-creation using computers
 - Root Causes and prevention identified in report
- What happened in 1887:
 - 15,000 people viewed crash site
 - Major newspapers all sent reporters
 - Papers did not send photographers
 - Less than 20 photographs survive
 - cursory investigation by newly formed group
(no drawings or photographs)

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

“The Wreck”

- TP&W did not want wreck around very long
 - trains had to run every day
 - bad publicity for the railroad
- Wreck was cleaned up and gone just a few days after the crash
 - Many Chatsworth area residents took souvenirs from the wreck and still have them today

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

“The Wreck”



1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck



1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck



1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck



15,000 visitors came to see the wreck!
[Note long dresses in August Heat]

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

Harper's Weekly Magazine Illustrations

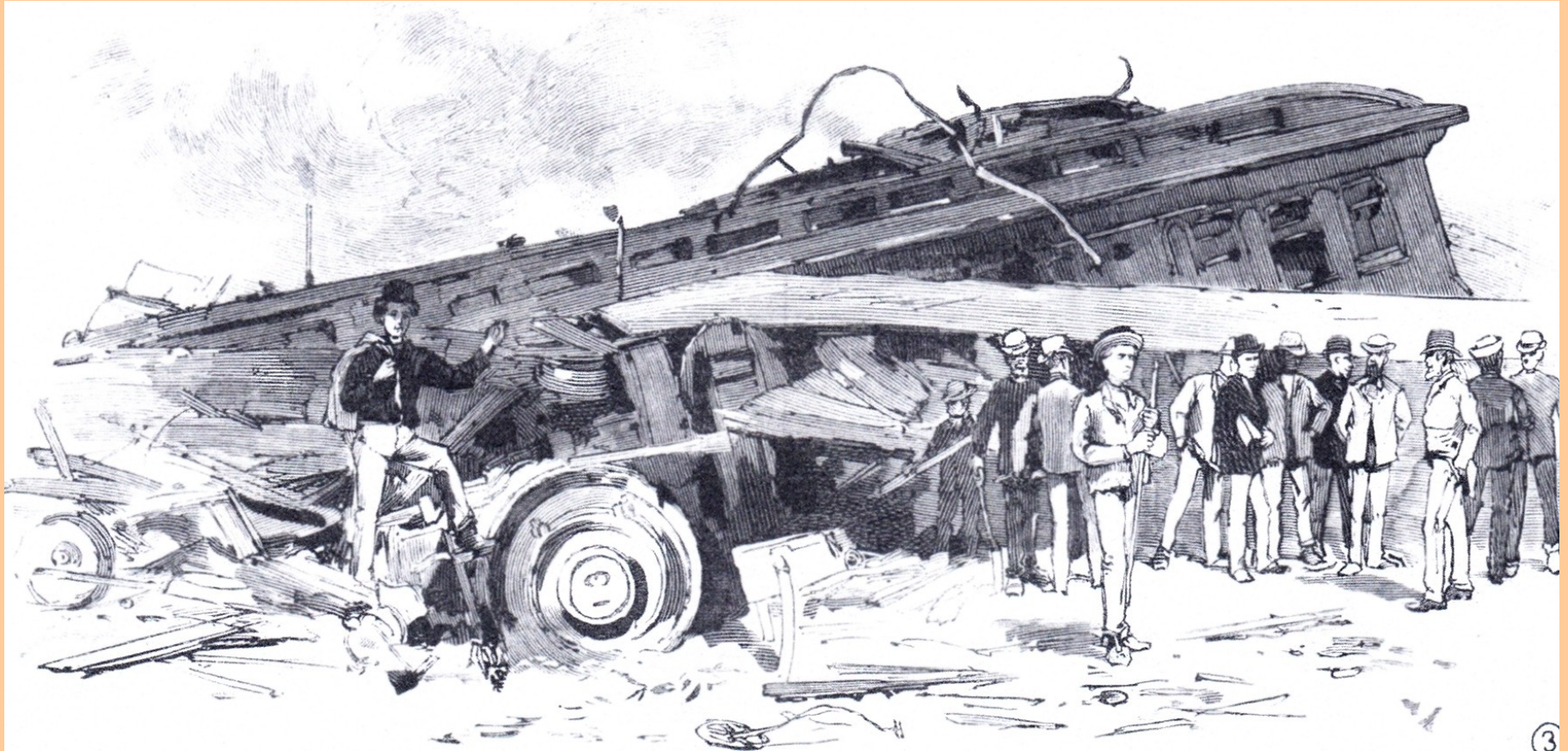


1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck



Citizens and doctors from Fairbury, Forrest, Chatsworth, and Piper City all did heroic duties attending to injured and dead.

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck



Yes, 13 was an unlucky number that day !

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

Search for the Guilty

- After every catastrophic event, people want to know immediately.....
 - What was the cause?
 - Who was responsible?
- Press often has story wrong the first few days after the event.
- Sometimes it takes two years to figure out what really happened and how to prevent it.
 - Airplane crashes
 - Deepwater Horizon oil rig leak took 3 years

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

Search for the Guilty

- Train Wreck followed same story with wrong causes initially

-**Theory #1:** TP&W Foreman and crew forgot to put out their brush fire, and it caught wood bridge on fire

-Investigation found that crew was several miles away from the bridge and could not have caused the bridge to catch on fire

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

Search for the Guilty

- Train Wreck followed same story with wrong causes initially

-Theory #2: Professional robbers intentionally wrecked the train by burning the bridge so they could rob the dead & injured passengers.

-Although there were several reports of people robbing the dead and injured, no premeditated plot was found

-Railroad officials really liked this theory !!

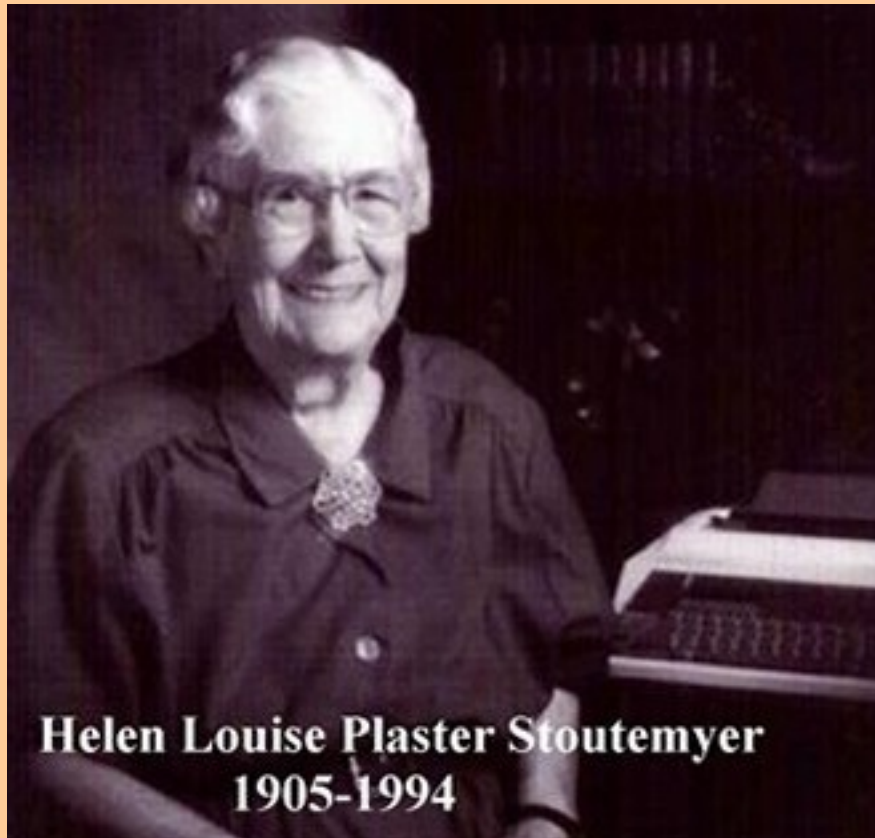
1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

Search for the Guilty

- Commission issued its report at end of 1887, about 4 months after the accident.
- Commission theorized that a burning ember was dropped onto the bridge by a freight train that ran over the bridge several hours before the passenger train.
- Commission recommended railroad have every wood bridge checked just prior to the passenger train using the bridge.

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

- Mrs. Stoutemyer (1905-1994) was Chatsworth school teacher
- She became very interested in Chatsworth local history.
- She interviewed Chatsworth people about the wreck
- Also collected all the information she could find about the wreck



Helen Louise Plaster Stoutemyer
1905-1994

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

THE TRAIN THAT NEVER ARRIVED



Niagara Excursion
Aug. 10, 1887

- Her 1st Edition was published in 1970 by the Fairbury Blade Publishing Company
- 2nd Edition published in 1980
- 68 pages long
- Now out of print for 44 years.

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

- In 2020, I was asked to update Mrs. Stoutemyer's 1970 book
- She did not have the advantage of using the Internet to research the wreck
- I received permission to use the materials from her book, then add to it
- Using the Internet, I was able to triple the content of her original book.

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

The Great Chatsworth Train Wreck of 1887

Dale C. Maley



I liked the illustration from
the 1887 Harper's
Weekly Magazine

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

The Great Chatsworth Train Wreck of 1887

Dale C. Maley



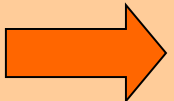
New Findings Include:

- Transcripts of interviews done by Railroad Commission investigating the wreck

- Final report and recommendations of the Railroad Commission

- Additional photographs, illustrations and magazine articles

- Russian Hackers Story
Police Gazette



1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck



- Found reference on Internet

- Called Police Gazette

- Said to go to web site of retired guy who scans in old magazines as a hobby

- Web site down

- Hacked by Russians !!

“He Blew His Brains Out”

- Written in “Sensational”
National Enquirer style

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

Mysteries

- Every history story has some unsolved mysteries
-

- There were reports by several different people of the dead and injured being robbed after the wreck

- It was common for a couple of thieves to be on passenger trains in that era.

- Documented stories of Fairbury people being robbed on trains.

- Were these rumors started by people and therefore not true?

- Were personal possessions simply lost in the wreck blamed on thieves?

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck

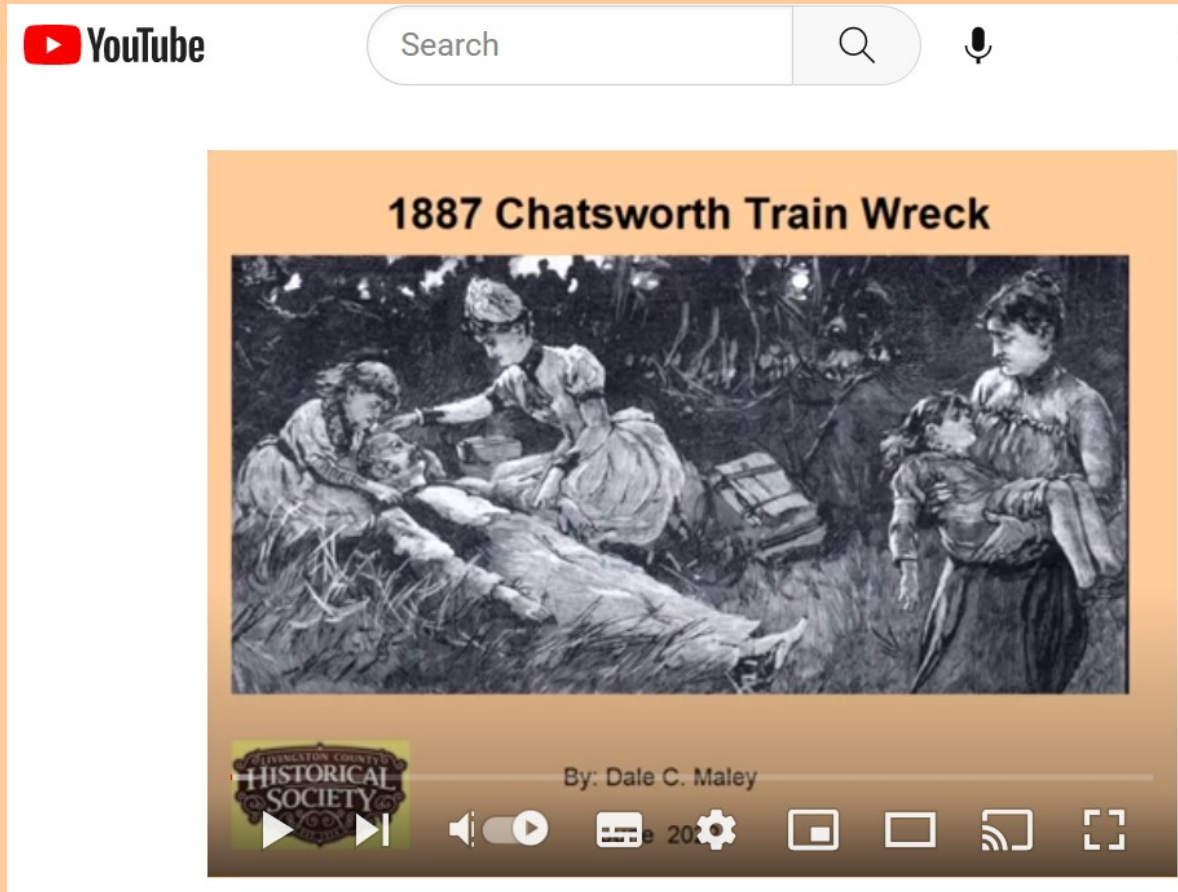
The Great Chatsworth Train Wreck of 1887

Dale C. Maley



- Book can be borrowed from Fairbury, Chatsworth, and Pontiac libraries.
- Printed copies for sale at Walton Centre in Fairbury or Community Connection Gift Shop in Chatsworth
- Kindle E-book or printed books available from Amazon.com

1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck



- This presentation is on YouTube
- Internet address is: <https://tinyurl.com/3sucrw3h>

Summary

- The Chatsworth 1887 Train Wreck still ranks as the 7th worst U.S. train wreck in terms of fatalities
 - 85 Fatalities
 - 372 Injured
- Fairbury, Forrest, Chatsworth, and Piper City residents rallied together to give aid to the injured and dead
- In retrospect, the 1887 Chatsworth Train Wreck was very predictable:
 - Freight trains dropping hot coals onto the track
 - Drought conditions
 - Wood bridge
 - Night trip where smoke not visible
 - Passenger cars made of wood

Questions?